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Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play:

A Community Engagement Project Offering a Therapeutic Experience by Exploring an
Emergent Method of Expressive Arts Therapy with Clinicians Who Studied Expressive Arts

Therapy

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Thesis Instructor: Marisol Norris, PhD, MT-BC

Abstract

For this community engagement project, I explored an emergent practice of Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play with expressive arts therapists. This practice aligns with Buddhist philosophy and practice in the West and its benefits can be explained through the theory of Embodied Simulation. The literature on Buddhism and Embodied Simulation highlights the positive benefits of abstract meditative processes done in groups. My goal was to explore the therapeutic elements of K(a)P within a community group setting. When elements of Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play were introduced to a group of alumni from Lesley's Expressive Arts Therapy graduate program it was received well. I learned that the elements of creativity, interconnectedness, and attunement of the method that resonated with me were also important to the community members' experiences. I was also able to refine the way I introduce and facilitate when exploring the method in order to be of most benefit. I believe Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play is a practice that could benefit many people who practice Expressive Arts Therapy.

Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play: A Community Engagement Project Offering a Therapeutic Experience
by Exploring an Emergent Method of Expressive Arts Therapy with Clinicians Who Studied
Expressive Arts Therapy

Introduction

“It is this kind of mutual resonance experienced as connectivity, unity, understanding, support, empathy, and acceptance that can contribute greatly to creating a sense of psychological healing”

-Mitchell Kossak

In a class I shared with Jesse Newcomb, an Expressive Arts Therapy collaborator and co-explorer, Newcomb presented a kinesthetic experience, unlike anything I had ever witnessed. It appeared to me to be an authentic movement duet with a large sheet of paper in which both entities morphed and mingled into and out of various intricate sculptures in a beautiful sequence of spontaneous gestures. That presentation marked the beginning of a shared exploration of embodied, non-conceptual, dyadic encounters in which a piece of paper was a nonverbal enacting element.

Over the course of about a year investigating this practice, I became aware of the positive impacts it had on my disposition and my ability to be creative and harmonious in various interactions. My interest in what Newcomb named Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play (referred to in this discourse as K(a)P) gradually blossomed into a positive practice of exploring movement, authenticity, and relationship. In this primarily non-verbal form of creativity, I was able to experience flow states, moments of timelessness, and increased attunement.

In our reflections after practice, Newcomb and I would often arrive at serendipitously parallel conclusions about what had happened. We would often be in awe that one person offered

exactly what the other needed during the K(a)P session. For example, one of us would present a gesture with the paper that made sense to the other without having previously or verbally communicated that need. The development over time only heightened the non-verbal and non-conceptual elements of the practice, which felt very valuable to me.

The benefits I felt after practicing K(a)P were similar to those I have experienced, and others have written about, in Buddhist practices. It became clear to me that this practice offered a new embodied experience similar to eastern practices that focused on non-duality, non-conceptual frameworks, and an integration of body and mind. K(a)P offered an emergent way of experiencing the three aforementioned notions beyond cognitive acumen. The continued practice led me to wonder whether others may feel similarly when doing the practice. Thus, I decided to offer K(a)P through this Capstone Project to a small population as a therapeutic experience. My goal was to both provide what I felt to be a positive therapeutic experience through elements of K(a)P and also further explore my understanding of this practice within a community group setting.

My Capstone Project comes at a significant time, as increasingly more Buddhist practices and philosophies are being introduced to Western consumers. Contemporary euro-centric scientific inquiry, for example, shows significant alignment with many of the Buddha's ancient teachings. In the inquiry done for this Capstone Project, I was excited to add to the cannon of scholarly articles that merge Buddhist views with western expressive arts practices. I also hoped to ask others in my field whether my offering was resonant in this way and what sorts of feelings and thoughts emerged from sharing K(a)P.

I chose to offer K(a)P to clinicians who have been through the Lesley University Expressive Arts Therapy and Art Therapy specialization program. Through this project I

suggested that K(a)P can be ideal to examine the experience of non-conceptual non-dual wisdom that has often been offered by Buddhist practices and scholastic inquiry. The project done to support this theory involved a literature review and an arts-based exploration using the method within the context of a community project.

The community that participated in this Capstone Project was defined in two major ways, though the voluntary participants happened to have some other commonalities that I did not specify. The primary definition was that of graduates of the Lesley Counseling Program who had specializations in an arts modality. The secondary definition was that the participants were a part of the network of clinicians who kept in touch after graduation, so all of them were contacted personally via word of mouth.

The forum for this project's exploration consisted of two meetings, each one hour long, that were two weeks apart. Four people were present each time. There was only one consistent participant besides me. The score for both sessions was as follows: self-directed warm-up, introduction to the material (taking a large piece from a roll of butcher paper 24" wide with lengths varying depending on how much the individual wanted), individual exploration, group exploration, time for individual reflection, and group sharing. The total time for each session was approximately one hour.

This Capstone Project is arranged in three main parts. The beginning of this discourse consists of a review of the literature around topics that are related to the thesis. It provides a historical context and explanations of dependent co-arising in Buddhist philosophy, embodied simulation, and populations of therapists practicing creative therapies. The literature review is followed by a description of the method used to offer a therapeutic experience to the target population and artistic interpretations of the outcomes of the sessions. The discourse ends on a

discussion of findings concerning the literature as well as suggestions for further exploration for those interested in this topic.

Literature Review

Since Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play is an emergent method, there is no direct literature about it; therefore, I have woven together three different topics that relate to K(a)P in an effort to give it cultural, historic, and scientific context. The three main research topics include Buddhist practices, Embodied Simulation, and new mental health clinicians. I have included literature on the similarities of K(a)P to Buddhist principles and the way K(a)P incorporates a level of Embodied Simulation to explain why K(a)P can be beneficial for new mental health clinicians. The relation of these topics is the theoretical groundwork for the project.

Buddhist Practices

The first topic, Buddhist practices, has a tremendous amount of literature, dating as far back as the end of first millennium BCE (Flood, 2008). It has only recently been examined in peer-reviewed western euro-centric literature. In this discourse I will focus on information from a select few contemporary peer-reviewed articles.

Buddhism is a nontheistic religion and philosophy which, in part, espouses the belief that all conditioned phenomena are characterized by the tenets of impermanence, lack of an inherent or unchanging self, and the presence of suffering or unsatisfactoriness (Johnson, 2019). Many of the practices that emerged from this belief encourage exploration of mindfulness through pure presence. Practices range from simple sitting meditation to more yogic techniques. Some of these practices, especially in the Vajrayana schools of Buddhism are quite abstract. A common thread between many of the practices that emerged from this way of thought involve attunement of the practitioner to their present experience in order to realize the nature of mind and alleviate

suffering (Harvey, 2013).

This common thread was salient in my practice of K(a)P, as Newcomb and I would gravitate towards the quality of mindfulness and experience relief from certain discomforts. Before engaging with K(a)P, for example, we might be feeling stressed from work or scholastic endeavors. In engaging creatively with paper in the K(a)P way, we were able to notice and embody constant changes, taking cues from each other, the environment, and the paper itself (all of which are constantly changing). Through the method I was able to attune to the experience of impermanence.

Perhaps the most intentionally impermanent and Buddhist aspect of K(a)P is the fact that it is a process-based method, quite in line with Expressive Arts Theory. The material itself, paper, is subject to myriad transformations throughout a session and is only sometimes kept for later use. It is a material that comes from the earth and will return to the earth, not unlike us all. This emphasis on impermanence has been used in research studies that are aligned with Buddhist doctrines and that indicates a positive effect on the practitioners (Russell et al, 2012). Through the experience of K(a)P one is offered the chance to engage fully in an abstract experience, knowing that it will not last in any form.

Many Buddhist scholars, practitioners, and religious leaders will highlight the theory that everything in our relative reality is maintained at a fundamental level by a system of interconnected elements of mutual causal interaction. There is no moment in space/time as we understand it that came before another; “cognition and the experienced world co-arise in mutual dependence” (Varela et al, 1991). The practice of K(a)P is like a physical metaphor for this concept.

In K(a)P, nothing happens independently of anything else. The Buddhist view that the

true nature of being has no autonomous or essential element within it (Macy, 1979) is seen through the translation of energy into an aesthetic authentic movement in K(a)P. Even the paper provides a “condition of reciprocal (or bilateral) and not transitive (or unidirectional) dependence” (Ferraro, 2019). K(a)P, providing a beautiful manifestation of this tenet, allows for interactions without a way to rationalize who, what, and how things happened during a session. It is a very open method not unlike Vajrayana open awareness practices.

The current impacts of Buddhist practices now have clinical and neuroscientific studies. These range from very specific topics such as pain management (Cheng, 2017) to a broader analysis of how Buddhism and western science intertwine (Wilson, 2018). Qualitative studies are beginning to show early results of Buddhist practice on stress management in individuals (Russell et al., 2012).

This growing availability of western scientific research inspires projects such as my own. It seems that there is not a “one-size-fits-all” to Buddhist disciplines. This may indicate that the application of the philosophy into an emergent practice, such as K(a)P has the potential to be just as beneficial, if not more, to those humans who may have a propensity to engage in authentic and abstract experiences that emerged from western movement practices.

In my experience with Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play, I found an opportunity to gain a new way of experiencing Buddhist doctrine with the added element of inter-human action. K(a)P provides “skillful know-how for enacting certain situated mind-body states and behaviors, not as a form of inner observation of a private realm,” rather as a lived experience (Varela et al., 1991). Situated within the canon of the intersections of Buddhism reception within Western psychological paradigms, particularly psychotherapeutic ones (Russell et al., 2012).

Embodied Simulation

The second topic, embodied simulation, is the western-scientific lens that explains what could be occurring biologically when participating in a Buddhist-like practice, such as K(a)P, with one or more individuals. This euro-centric evidence-based concept highlights the biological, psychological, and physical aspects of interdependence and intersubjectivity, which are two main elements of K(a)P. The concepts of ES resonate with the way I understand K(a)P and work as an addition to the theoretical framework that is being built for this emergent method. The groundwork for the theory of ES began in Italy during the 1990s. Scientists monitoring mammalian brains observed that certain areas of their premotor cortex were activated when experiencing the activities of others (Gallese et al, 1996). Though the observed brain was not tied to a body participating in an activity, the areas of the brain that *would* be tied to the activity were stimulated (DiPellegrino et al, 1992). This led to the discovery of mirror neurons, now being studied in human brain activity.

Mirror neurons are specialized cells that transmit information to other nerve cells, muscle, or gland cells and fire both when an animal acts and when the animal observes the same action performed by another (although the animal may be at rest). Mirror mechanisms for human emotions, sensations, and actions support the theory that there is a transitive and non-autonomous element to human cognition (Cuccio, 2015). These are constantly in play and there is no way to pinpoint, moment by moment, their exact interrelation as of now. The type of empathic resonance that mirror neurons point to does not require explicit representational content and furthermore this type of resonance may be a form of ‘mirroring’ that grounds empathy via an experiential mechanism (Buk, 2009).

Embodied simulation theory, an “embodied approach to intersubjectivity,” emerged from

the discovery of mirror mechanisms for action, emotions and sensations (Gallese, 2014). It suggests that human social interactions are imbued with meaning using reworking mental states or processes in functionally attributing them to others. “In this context, simulation is conceived of as a non-conscious, pre-reflective functional mechanism of the brain-body system, whose function is to model objects, agents and events. This mechanism can be triggered during our interactions with others, but is also plastically modulated by contextual, cognitive and personal identity-related factors” (Gallese, 2014).

ES runs parallel to certain aspects of Buddhist philosophy in that it recognizes the human misunderstanding of a free or self-determinant identity. “...one might argue that the problem of the primacy either of the self or of intersubjectivity in social cognition is a false alternative, a sort of chicken-egg question. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of mammals in general, and of primates in particular, is to be born inside the other and with the other. Self and other are two self-contrasting notions: there is no self without the other and vice versa” (Gallese, 2014). Beyond giving us the ability to attune, embodied simulation gives us a corporal disposition. When humans access this attunement through metaphor, they can directly experience the place from which another’s state arises (Cuccio, 2015).

The processes of ES can be translated through aesthetic experience as well. Given a view of the body as “the constitutive source of our world experience, concepts like "internal" and "external", "subject" and "object" become nothing but verbal placeholders for the dynamic relation our body entertains with the world” (Gallese, 2017). This is where the paper that is used in K(a)P comes into play. An important part of Newcomb’s method is the acknowledgment that the paper, what some may view as the artwork, has just as much import as the other humans and plays on the neural system. One does not only act on the paper but receives information from it.

The practice involves imagining oneself as being of kin to the aesthetic aspect provided by the paper.

To tie this back into K(a)P and the Buddhist theories it parallels, when practicing K(a)P with others, one is enacting and co-creating methods that are beneficial on very subtle and abstract levels. If a person is engaging with the paper in an open and non-goal-oriented way, abiding in impermanence and interdependence, then the second person (by that person's mere presence, and hopefully interaction) may co-create and receive the positive effects of the practice. This may be heightened when two or more people are actively participating in a K(a)P session.

Recent Practitioners in Mental Health Counseling

The third topic has to do with the population that I am offering this therapeutic experience to; mental health clinicians who recently graduated. This last topic has a more contemporary body of literature that details early burnout, the need for clinician support services, and the benefits of therapeutic sessions that are co-created by the therapist and client. It was important to research this community for this project to compare the results of my inquiry to a larger body of research.

In using this population for my thesis project, I am also hoping to contribute to the information available on post-graduate artistic experiences. Since my project is not technically an Arts-Based Research study I cannot provide direct accounts of students' relationships to the artistic process. However, there is a handful of research that I found which resonated with my observations and holds up well when compared to other studies. Topics such as professional burnout, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue are now inspiring new methods of prevention and activities to practice that focus on self-healing and awareness

(Newell et al, 2010).

I have had many conversations and other types of feedback (body language, artworks) from recent clinicians. They report being overworked in what seems like an economically unsustainable practice. The most prominent and alarming factor was that due to financial limitations and lack of free time most students do not engage in personal artmaking and this continues after graduation (Orikibi, 2012).

Many turn to the proliferation of practices that come from ancient eastern traditions to relieve suffering. There is a tendency of these practices to dilute (and sometimes ignore) the main tenets of the philosophies that produced them. By introducing a culturally emergent practice such as K(a)P, my Capstone Project can add and inspire future projects and literature based on new practices that recall the original philosophies from which they emerged.

Recent graduates who are currently employed also report feelings of not being able to co-create in the sessions they facilitate. The ability to co-create and dialogue through non-verbal methods is extremely important for this population (Slott, 2018; Agarwal, 2019). By inviting this population to explore K(a)P, my project promotes the benefits of a practice of embodied co-creating. Part of the importance of co-creating has to do with the proposal that joint art-making mirrors parent-child dyadic engagement (Furneaux-Blick, 2019). Given a phenomenological approach to the process, an experienced level of non-verbal communication through attunement and presence with a client during a session has been reported to be very therapeutic (Agarwal, 2019). Working on an art piece with a client can give way to insights that would not have been possible in language communication. In exploring the Capstone project and during the inquiry sessions, an importance is placed on being non-verbal and attuned to present experiences. K(a)P in a method that promotes This article supports what arises artistically for the people who

participate in the piece.

Proposals for interventions using movement and dance, geared towards people experiencing empathy dysfunction have shown positive results (Behrends et al, 2012). After a brief history of the development of Dance Movement Therapy and definitions of empathy from psychological, philosophical, and biological frameworks, the authors develop a theory using movement interventions as the base for formulations of positive conceptualization of the self and social interactions. Synchronous movements like those used in DMT are present in K(a)P and foster empathy in those who participate.

Methods

To further explore elements of K(a)P and parallels between community members' explorations, I scored the community-based project used in this discourse. I focused on a community that I am about to join; unlicensed clinicians who graduated with an MA in Clinical Mental Health Counseling with a focus on Expressive Arts Therapy and were currently working. I found a small group of people willing to participate in this project through a network of clinicians who kept in touch post-graduation.

I arranged for two arts inquiry sessions at Lesley University. The first was attended by three participants. And followed a light score. During the first session we began with an informal check-in as each participant arrived. I followed this with a very brief explanation of the project, giving only enough information for context and comfort without giving any details about Buddhism or Embodied Simulation. After that, there was a grounding and centering body/mind warm-up; in the two sessions we began in a standing position with guided suggestions to bring attention to the body and breath. "Shake out any distractions," "Bring your mind to the present moment," and "Feel the ground beneath you" were all offerings during that warm-up. This first

part took an estimated fifteen minutes to complete.

The invitation after that was to explore the paper as an individual in whatever way felt authentic. After that we would move into dyad paper exploration, and lastly come into a whole group interaction. I purposely said very little explaining this part of the score. When pressed for explanations of what “explore the paper” meant, I offered an old Lesley motto: Do what you think I meant. This was intended to keep the movement and the interactions open to the energy and natural flow of the participants.

The openness of the project was amplified after meeting with my thesis advisor, Marina Strauss, LMHC. She was able to encourage my inquiry methods to expand. She also suggested I take an even more hands-off approach to facilitating (by not facilitating at all) and enter a participatory/observational role to immerse myself in the experience as well. The suggestion was incorporated and very aligned with K(a)P principles.

In the second session, therefore, the two participants were led in a warm-up similar to the first session. In this warmup there was breathing, grounding, and centering. With the eyes closed this presented the opportunity to focus inwards and feel into the participants’ authentic experience of the present moment.

Then they were given a large paper with simply the invitation to explore. Other than that, there was no verbal explanation. No questions were answered, and nothing was clarified. I chose this openness in direction with the explicit intent of offering an open method in which the participants could be fully authentic. The three of us did an individual artistic response followed by a group discussion. Records of the project were kept through post-session journaling, art-making, and notating group discussions. In both sessions, I created graphic documentation on paper during the discussion and created an artistic response to community members’ artistic

response.

Results

Observed Similarities

In both sessions the project was received openly. The community members were familiar with each other, having been through the same Lesley program at the same time. Their openness to the project and each other made for a positive atmosphere of acceptance and awareness to the project and each other.

In the reflections offered after each K(a)P exploration, I found many similarities. All the participants, for example, verbally communicated having a felt experience of being in a sort of flow during the session. These reflections appeared in words describing nature. Many associations such as wind, water, ocean, rainstorm, stars were voiced. These symbols were visually depicted in many of the participants' artistic reflections as well.

When translating feedback visually, I found myself producing a lot of swirls and circles. I was drawn to create imagery that oscillated and flowed. In both sessions, my artistic responses to what was shared had many symbols and short gestural marks rather than completed or detailed representations. I felt a great comfort and sense of relief while making these types of marks and there was a resonant feeling of empathy as I translated what was being said.

A key similarity in both sessions was the participants' eagerness to engage in the process offered. There seemed to be an enthusiasm in knowing that this was an artistic inquiry into something beneficial for humans. There was a craving to be making art with their community. There was an open awareness that this was an exciting emergent method. Perhaps this disposition added to the positivity in the results of their participation.

Observed Differences

In the first session, given the score, the participants interacted as I anticipated. What was most interesting to me, though, was the unpredictability of *when* and *how* the participants would interact. The participants seemed to move fluidly and with a felt sense of togetherness from individual K(a)P to a dyad exploration, before moving into what reflected a group version of what I first saw Newcomb do in their first presentation. Participants reported “knowing” that it was the right moment to change interactions.

In the second session, an explanation of the project was not given. There was only an invitation to explore the paper. In this session, there was far less observable reciprocal action. The lack of score or suggestion for how the K(a)P experience might look left me without the desire to expect any particular experience that might arise. In the second session, I was more attuned to *what* would happen, and my interest felt more focused on experiencing the participants’ verbal and artistic reflections.

In my artistic response to the second K(a)P session, I also depicted a simple human form with lines and swirls coming out from the figure’s heart center. This was the most complete and literal as my marks got. It was important because another participant had drawn human hands. When we came together and shared our representations it was an important re-affirmation that the second session had felt much more personal. The focus was inward though there was a sense of containment, safety, and community.

Interpretations

When combining the results of these sessions, I was struck by how genuine the community’s reactions, responses, and participation were. A few members linked their experiences of K(a)P to what was going on in their lives, or things that had happened to them

throughout the week. Some participants brought in experiences from other disciplines that they practice. I appreciated seeing each individual's way of participating.

It was wonderful to hear feedback that resonated with my original experience. It was a very zen experience for many of them and they all reported, even though physical differences in interacting with the method, feeling that the session was much needed. Some reflected that they would like more information on Buddhism and Embodied Simulation.

I interpreted the community members' eagerness to engage as confirmation that K(a)P, as well as other artistic methods, are really important to the wellbeing of new clinicians. It showed me how starved for this type of experience new clinicians often are, not only for themselves but for their clients. This eagerness also points to the necessity of ET's/clinicians to keep in contact with their community and have a regular group practice like K(a)P that can provide many of the positive ES effects in an artistic and culturally authentic way.

Since the sessions were a bit different, I was able to translate the group dynamics as well. Given this specific community, it appeared beneficial to take a less structured approach to the K(a)P exploration. I saw that the individuals were able to bring what they needed to their own experience. Less structure provided more agency. Trusting in these trained artists and clinicians was key to achieving the full therapeutic benefit. These elements were reflected in my artistic response (Figure 1).

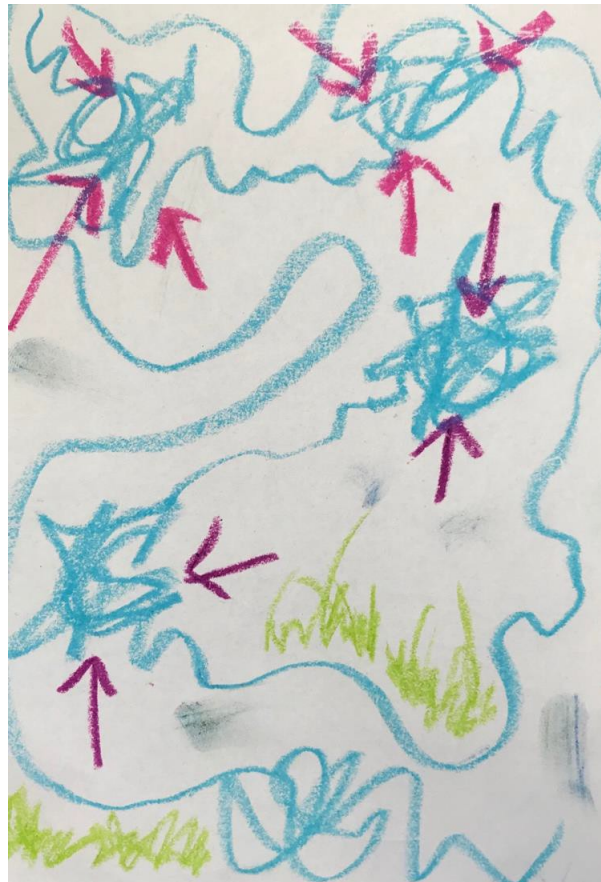


Figure 1. Artistic Response #1

Conclusions

For this project, I will discuss the experiences observed in both groups and also provide my conclusions. I feel it is important to separate these into two discussions. This is in an effort not to claim ownership or authority over the ideas that surfaced from the population.

The conclusions from the two groups focused on the potential benefits of a continued group practice that uses methods such as K(a)P. After having graduated, the group members reported feeling distanced from the community in which they were in constant contact with each other, for example. In the context of the university setting, these participants had access not only to their community but to support and resources, which are not readily available to them as professionals

(i.e. art materials).

The elements of creativity, interconnectedness, and attunement were very important and present during all the art making sessions. I felt a strong sense of shared creativity and focus within both groups was adding to how the community felt and how focused they were when participating in the practice. These are all qualities that I would like to encourage within groups I will facilitate. I feel like this community project informed how I will be open in sharing these types of embodied practices with others.

In the discussion portion of the second session, the conversation turned from the direct experience of K(a)P to the need for transitional services that could be supervised and relevant to the Lesley community; a sort of alumni support aftercare service where emergent methods could be shared, practiced, and proliferated. It was mentioned that the focus of support groups could be on group or individual or dyad sessions and would greatly benefit their abilities to be present and focused in their new work settings with their clients.

In my synthesis of visual and verbal feedback with the experience of offering K(a)P as a therapeutic experience to new mental health clinicians, I found a deeper sense of the interconnectedness of the participants and was able to understand how to let the process flow. My artistic response (Figure 2) reflects these elements. There is a level of non-verbal communication that aligns with the Buddhist principles which allow the participants to intuit their flow within the K(a)P experience. I experienced confirmations of my hypothesis in the way the community participated and reflected in the K(a)P experience.



Figure 2. Artistic Response #2

A significant part of my conclusion was that any amount of facilitation in this method can significantly alter the intention of the practice in profound ways. Although I saw evidence of co-creation and interaction in both sessions, the simple score in the first session restricted the participants a lot more. I could see how the light direction was amplified in the absence of materials or specified product. The idea of opening the field of play by refraining from a score allowed the participants to connect in the way that was most authentic to their present needs, both individually and collectively.

It is also worth noting that though I was greatly encouraged by the participation and

reflections shared during the sessions, the results of my inquiry are far from the conclusive output needed to completely validate my hypothesis. This Capstone serves as the first step in an ongoing exploration of K(a)P in that it situates the method in a historic and community context. Already, some participants are asking for more sessions and have been in the related research that weaves together the three topics (Buddhism, ES, and new mental health clinicians).

Discussion

The initial impetus was to offer K(a)P to a community in order to see if there were similarities in how people resonated with K(a)P. Part of the impetus for this inquiry also had to do with my discomfort with the way some practices that are rooted in Buddhist tradition are presented in the United States. I have sometimes felt discomfort in these practices because they are culturally very different and can be harder to embody. Some of these practices have also felt diluted to fit a more western tradition. In the introduction to and the continued practice of K(a)P, I was able to find an emergent and authentic practice that resonated with my knowledge and research on Buddhism and its principles and practices. I had a feeling that in sharing this with my community, I would find a group of resonant bodies open to this method and who could benefit from its effect.

This emergent method had amplified effects when done with Newcomb versus doing it alone. My intuition told me that there must be a good reason for this, and I came across the theory of ES. I began to piece together how and why this emergent practice felt the way it did. Reciprocal action in bodies, tied in with Buddhist principles, could amplify the abstraction and presence of the participants.

It was also critical for me to introduce a positive practice to a community that I am about to become a member of, seeing as how there is so much information on how stressful,

inauthentic, and difficult being a new clinician can be. I had already heard anecdotally about how little art was practiced by new clinicians (with and without their clients). I was starting to read more about early burnout and lack of self-care on behalf of new graduates in mental health. The increase of “mindfulness” practices and other methods that were brought over from eastern culture and history didn’t seem to quite be meeting the needs of the new mental health clinicians that I was talking to. Knowing that one of the main tenets of Buddhism is to relieve suffering gave me insight into how this new method could do just that for new clinicians practicing Expressive Arts Therapy and in turn those of the clients receiving their care.

Though the theoretical framework that ties Buddhism and Embodied Simulation is only one aspect of K(a)P, this project and discourse provides a foundation for further exploration. Other aspects could include relation to culturally emergent practices, co-creation of therapeutic experiences, and the number of topics related to mental health counseling.

The exploration of K(a)P may help others who are open to structuring their explorations of similar inquiries in a new way. Traditionally, western thought suggests maintaining the same setup and method for the entire inquiry. I learned in this artistic inquiry process that it may be beneficial and interesting to start with a framework and slowly phase out of it. Then, through the analysis of the differences between sessions one can gather data about how best to offer therapeutic experiences. Through this type of work others may be inspired to provide a framework with less facilitation and more participation.

For example, I wonder if inquiries and projects would arrive at similar conclusions to mine if those other inquiries were using a scored session in contrast to a session in which there was only the simple invitation to explore. In my particular inquiry of K(a)P, the scored session provided intent and a semblance of a path through the artistic and kinesthetic journey. The scored

facilitation helped the participants in the first session also suggested how to ease into a type of corporal/aesthetic parallel of embodied simulation.

In the second session, the invitation to explore felt more intense to me. I was observing what felt like two very excited states operating together/independently. In the second non-scored session, there was a non-verbal encouragement to focus on aesthetic/artistic parallel experience by exploring “alone/together” and this arose naturally. These contrasts provide a format, some questions, and an inspiration for others to explore how structured they are when offering their artistic interventions.

This Capstone Project also serves as an example of an emergent practice that is reflective of eastern philosophy without being culturally appropriative. I believe it may encourage other explorations of principles rather than dogmatic adherence to others' cultural practices. While I am a proponent of cross-cultural dialogue, exploration, and learning, I feel that emergent practices that tie into ancient philosophies can be, for some, a much more impactful way of translating philosophies.

This K(a)P project provides an explanation of how a different culture can create practices that embody Buddhist principles in authentic ways. This would be in the hope that the principles, in this emergent method, will be resonant and easier to metabolize. This project may provide a way to explore insights into the practice that can inspire our connections to our fundamental selves and relieve suffering.

Another aspect of this project that is important is the way in which this emergent practice amplifies the therapeutic effects of K(a)P's Buddhist principles through the theory of embodied simulation. Since the kind of empathic resonance caused by imitation “does not require explicit representational content and may be a form of ‘mirroring’ that grounds empathy via an

experiential mechanism,” then the openness and co-creating that occurs in K(a)P can fall into the canon of abstract interventions that amplify the use of mirror neurons (Buk, 2009). Much like the way tuning forks will cause sympathetic vibrations when struck and placed near each other, the way people interact and attune in K(a)P amplifies the participant’s experience of presence and non-conceptual thought. Together, a positive feedback cycle of co-created embodiment and presence emerges.

Though there are a lot more questions about the practice and about other emergent practices that are rooted in Buddhist philosophy, the effects of group work considering neuroscientific research and cognitive science are emerging with explanations of how these practices work. In its principles K(a)P aligns with the current trends in enactive cognition that purports that the brain is not the sole location of the mind, but rather is spread out among the brain, the body and the environment (Fuchs, 2009).

Among the participants in the two sessions held there were no music or drama therapists (only expressive arts and art therapists were represented). Thus, there is the question of how it would be received within other modality focused communities. Of all the modalities, I do suspect Dance Movement Therapists would find a lot of common ground. In DMT methods, “...interactional, coordinated movement forms an important base for the development of empathy and prosocial behavior” (Berhends, 2017, p. 107). The open movement aspect of K(a)P correlates with many movement-based therapeutic practices as well.

Another avenue of inquiry that I am still interested in relates to the ways that Buddhist philosophy can be intertwined with the practice, perhaps imbuing sessions with more emphasis on embodying non-duality, compassion, and presence. Buddhism has influenced traditional psychotherapy in the recent past, and expressive arts therapy is following suit (Mruk, 2003). To

do so in a more intentional way could lead to more positive benefits.

In being more intentional in the incorporation of Buddhism, I learned that it may be helpful for me to start with the stronger score. This would be similar to the first session. More structure would encourage the participants to focus on one facet of the practice. This reminds me of the explorations with Newcomb in which they encouraged listening to the paper and spending a more prolonged period of time without moving. This was an invitation to quiet the mind and allow it space before movement or interaction., much like one does in meditation practices.

It would be quite fascinating to monitor what happens in the brain during the experience of K(a)P via neuroimaging studies. Hopefully, this discourse is only the beginning of a larger body of work that relates K(a)P not only to other studies, but to the growing body of information on the therapeutic methodology of Expressive Arts Therapy.

Practices like K(a)P can be vastly beneficial to new clinicians that are trained in the arts and who have studied different modalities such as Expressive Arts Therapy, Visual Arts Therapy, Drama Therapy, etc. The effects may extend beyond the personal benefit. Like other methodologies, in K(a)P there is a focus on experiencing the process. If the process aims to “give shape to the therapist’s experience of the patient’s experience of self and other,” the clinician may come to realize their assumptions about their client and embody the nuances of shared experience (Havsteen-Franklin et al, 2015). The paper and the non-verbal human interaction are the elements of K(a)P that become “a vessel for communication,” and being comfortable with this can encourage experiencing and relating things that do not always need to be verbalized (Marshall-Tierney, 2014).

Epilogue

The completion of this thesis comes at an unprecedented time. The outbreak of the 2019-

novel corona virus (2019-nCoV) emerged in a market in Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 (Suresh, 2020). It has since spread worldwide with infection rates in the hundreds of thousands, and a global death toll reaching over 30,000 as of March 29, 2020 (Anderson, 2020). Protective measures resemble previous attempts to curb pandemics, most notably social distancing and isolation.

I began the exploration and writing before the outbreak, at which time there was no concern for being in contact with others. If anything, many clinicians in training talked about the need for more contact, especially in creative healing settings. I remember discussions throughout my graduate education reflecting how starved for touch American culture can be sometimes. We would talk about how detrimental isolation and distance is for many people living with mental health issues. Given the current climate, however, we are now encouraged to do exactly that, and refrain from physical contact. We're not sure for how long. It became hard for me to finish this discourse during a time in which the method could not be practiced.

Though the development of K(a)P as described in this project is interactive, the first time I witnessed it Newcomb was presenting it as an individual exploration. I rested in that memory for a while, and I know that it is also done solo. I do believe both individual and group explorations are valid avenues with which to explore this method. The presence and impact of Embodied Simulation may not apply in the same way during a solo session, but the attunement, creative openness, and embodiment of non-conceptual Buddhist principles are quite salient.

As this sudden outbreak propels the world into a new phase, it is just as important to be attuned, aware, and present to the larger flow of energies. Playing with creativity during times of restriction, uncertainty, and volatility can lead to presence and equanimity. This emergent method, born just before a period of such heightened collective energies, will now enter a

developmental stage, perhaps with an internal focus and digital/virtual explorations of sharing and communicating.

May this project provide a foundation and inspiration for those explorations in any way that may benefit all. May this project be a record of Kin(a)esthetic Paper Play's dawn, as an offering of help in relieving suffering. May this project be in service to all emergent methods providing a non-conceptual practice for cutting through hindrances and obscurations.

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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